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‘Big Clean’, the ‘Death Ship’ and the Hazardous Waste Trade between West Germany and Turkey, 1987–1988

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This article narrates the history of two high-profile West German-Turkish toxic waste scandals in 1988. It argues that they marked a watershed moment between two ‘waste regimes’. The first scandal showcased to the Turkish and West German publics how waste dealers and policy makers misleadingly packaged hazardous waste exports as a substitute for traditional forms of debt and as a vehicle for economic development. The opposition it fuelled hastened the demise of this waste regime by prompting the Turkish government to enact a ban on toxic waste imports. The second scandal revealed the new regime that emerged in its aftermath – one in which waste dealers and policy makers sought to evade new restrictions in the less visible margins of a changing regulatory and legal space.

Introduction

In November 1988, a columnist at *Cumhuriyet*, the newspaper of Turkey’s republican establishment, wondered whether his country was becoming Western Europe’s ‘garbage dump’.¹ This was certainly the impression left by two recent scandals that had fuelled a public debate in Turkey, West Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe about the desirability, legality and viability of a dangerous, often obscure area of commerce.² Turkey’s recent transformation into one of the hot new markets for Western toxic waste exports might have resulted from the country’s scant regulations and the growing pressures on businesses in Western Europe to dispose of hazardous refuse away from home.³ Yet, prior

¹ ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988. The quote is ‘Will Turkey become Western Europe’s garbage dump?’ (‘Türkiye, Batı Avrupa ülkelerinin çöp deposu mu olacak?’). This phrase was widely used in Turkish newspapers at the time. See also ‘İthal çöpte büyük kâr’, *Milliyet*, 17 Feb. 1988. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

² The main sources of Turkish toxic waste imports were West Germany, France, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the Benelux states. See ‘Hazine Müsteşarlığı varillerin peşine düştü’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988; ‘Fern in der Türkei, wo der Giftmüll brennt...’, *Tageszeitung*, 2 Feb. 1988, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (Archives of the German Green Party), Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin (henceforth ‘AGG’). On West German and Western European pressures to export toxic waste outside of the EEC, see ‘Halkımızın sağlığı ile oynanmasına, doğamızın kirletilmesine göz yumulmamalı. İthal çöpler ve sağlığımız’, *Milliyet*, 3 Mar. 1988; ‘Vermerk. Betr.: Forschungsvorhaben “Auswirkungen von Umweltschutzmaßnahmen auf die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit umweltschutzkostenintensiver Produktionen der deutschen Industrie”; hier: Besprechung bei Hoechst AG, Frankfurt, am 08.01.1988’, 2 Feb. 1988; ‘Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung. Projektangebot zum Forschungsvorhaben “Auswirkungen von Umweltschutzmaßnahmen auf die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit umweltschutzkostenintensiver Produktion der deutschen Wirtschaft” (BMWI-Katalog Nr. 15/88), Berlin, Mai 1988’, May 1988, B102/372607, Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives) Koblenz (henceforth ‘BArch’).

³ On Turkey’s limited regulations, Sami Gören and Feyza Özdemir, ‘Regulation of Waste and Waste Management in Turkey’, *Waste Management & Research: The Journal for a Sustainable Circular Economy*, 29, 4 (2011) discuss how Turkey’s waste regulations were only expanded between 2003 and 2008. See also Atilla Akkoyunlu et al., ‘Hazardous Waste Management in Turkey’, *Journal of Hazardous, Toxic and Radioactive Waste*, 21, 4 (2017). On the factors contributing to rapidly growing West German toxic waste exports, which tripled between 1983 and 1986 alone, see Richard C. Porter, *The Economics of Waste* (Washington, DC: Resources for the Future, 2002), 112–13; Laura A. Strohm, ‘The Environmental Politics of the International Waste Trade’, *The Journal of Environment and*

to the country's year of toxic waste obsession in 1988, waste traders had profited from operating largely in the shadows. As this article shows, the two scandals that brought toxic waste into public view in Turkey embodied what Gabrielle Hecht has termed a 'material channel' for global and transnational power – a form of 'technopolitics' that, in part by highlighting existing structures of power to an alarmed public, also provided the impetus for resistance and change.⁴ By casting light on what remained an opaque and wilfully disguised trade, these cases redefined how a variety of actors in West Germany and in Turkey understood, related to, and tolerated the hazardous waste trade.

The first of the two scandals presented in this article, centred on the so-called 'Isparta cement factory' or 'Big Clean' scandal in late 1987 and early 1988, introduces the overarching dynamics of, and the key actors involved in, the West German-Turkish trade. It shows how West German and Western European toxic waste dealers explicitly packaged their exports to Turkey as a novel form of economic development assistance and as a substitute for traditional forms of debt.⁵ Through their claims that entirely new products – tangible ones like 'replacement fuel' that could be used in factories and intangible ones like economic growth – would result from waste trading, dealers and even some politicians exploited the slippage between two divergent views of waste that encompassed both its economically productive and environmentally destructive dimensions.⁶ This process resulted from and helped define what Catherine Alexander and Andrew Sanchez have described as waste's 'formlessness or indeterminacy' – a domain that occupied the 'space between waste and value'.⁷ As a whole, the 'Big Clean' scandal highlights the connections and tensions between the allegedly beneficial permutations of toxic waste – as a supposed vehicle for economic development and as a substitute for debt – and the harm and devastation it threatened to unleash.

The second story, centred on the odyssey of the West German-flagged *Petersberg* cargo ship in the Marmara and Black Seas later in 1988, shows how corporate actors and Western European states like West Germany and Austria profited from a complex and often vague set of laws and regulations in order to circumvent whatever restrictions emerged – including the 1988 ban on toxic waste imports enacted by the Turkish government in response to the 'Big Clean' scandal. The *Petersberg* saga offered a Euro-Mediterranean parallel to the 1986 voyage of the *Khian Sea*, the ship carrying poisonous ash from the United States to various ports in the Caribbean that, as Emily Brownell has shown, came to exemplify how 'ocean travel transformed waste into new things, both legitimately and surreptitiously'.⁸ The affair not only represented an early challenge to Turkey's recent ban on toxic waste imports; it also revealed how the complexity and invisibility of a fast-changing regulatory order prompted some policy

Development, 2, 2 (Jul. 1993), 129–30; 'Pressemitteilung Nr. 130/86. Grüne streben gesetzliches Verbot des Giftmülltourismus an', 26 Feb. 1986, B.II.1, 6287, AGG. To be sure, the hazardous waste trade predated the 1980s by several decades, though on a much smaller scale. See, for instance, Simone M. Müller, 'The "Flying Dutchmen": Ships' Tales of Toxic Waste in a Globalized World', in Christof Mauch, ed., 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind', *RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society*, 1 (2016). Kate O'Neill notes that a majority of waste trading occurred between industrialised nations. See Kate O'Neill, *Waste Trading Among Rich Nations: Building a New Theory of Environmental Regulation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

⁴ Gabrielle Hecht, 'Hopes for the Radiated Body: Uranium Miners and Transnational Technopolitics in Namibia', *Journal of African History*, 51 (2010), 214.

⁵ Emily Brownell, 'Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste', *Environmental History*, 16 (Apr. 2011), 278, notes that these phenomena have been well documented for former colonies and metropolises, like Benin and France.

⁶ Joshua Reno discusses this tension between waste as economically generative and waste as a 'lost and irredeemable expenditure, one that is the opposite of economic productivity' in *Military Waste: The Unexpected Consequences of Permanent War Readiness* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 2. See also Joshua Reno, 'Waste and Waste Management', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44 (2015), 560, and Joshua Reno, 'Your Trash is Someone's Treasure: The Politics of Value at a Michigan Landfill', *Journal of Material Culture*, 14, 1 (2009). Catherine Alexander and Joshua Reno define the process as 'recycling', which transforms 'used objects and materials . . . into something else' rather than resulting in them being 'discarded'. See Catherine Alexander and Joshua Reno, eds., *Economics of Recycling: The Global Transformation of Materials, Values and Social Relations* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1.

⁷ 'Introduction: The Values of Indeterminacy', in Catherine Alexander and Andrew Sanchez, eds., *Indeterminacy: Waste, Value, and the Imagination* (New York: Berghahn, 2019), 2.

⁸ Brownell, 'Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste', 276.

makers and businesses to repurpose an ethically fraught trade to their own ends, in particular by attempting to identify and exploit new loopholes and legal grey areas.

The 'Big Clean' and *Petersberg* scandals occurred at, and helped created, a fracture point between two West German-Turkish 'waste regimes' – systems that, as Zsuzsa Gille has defined them, were shaped by the 'social institutions and conventions that not only determine what wastes are considered valuable but also regulate their production and distribution'.⁹ They illustrate how West German industrial waste in Turkey was transformed over the course of one year from a politically tolerated (and even desirable) debt swap and vehicle for economic development into a prohibited domain that authorities in both states attempted to regulate. The 'Big Clean' scandal both illustrated the dynamics of the earlier waste regime to the West German and Turkish publics and hastened its demise, prompting waste dealers and policy makers to evade new restrictions in the less visible margins of a changing regulatory and legal space, as the 'Death Ship' affair showed.¹⁰

Together, these two illustrative cases explore how some of the key dynamics underlying the global toxic waste trade not only inflected relations between industrialised nations, between former colonies and metropolises, or between the West and the Eastern bloc.¹¹ Instead, by investigating the means used by West German waste exporters, West German and Turkish policy makers, and local Turkish officials to define and resist the shift in waste regimes of 1988, they show how this pivotal moment in the Euro-Mediterranean 'Wasteocene' shaped relations between central and peripheral parts of capitalist Europe.¹² To be sure, the West German-Turkish example was coloured by several of the defining characteristics identified by scholars of the global waste trade. It resulted from, and purported to remedy, the 'differential development between countries' that, as Iris Borowy has shown, lay at the root of the trade's origins in the 1970s and its rapid growth in the 1980s.¹³ It was understood in Turkish and West

⁹ Zsuzsa Gille, 'From Risk to Waste: Global Food Waste Regimes', *The Sociological Review*, 60 (2013), 29. See also Zsuzsa Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: the Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); and Brownell, 'Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste', 263. According to Joshua Reno, a waste regime refers to 'the way that waste is dominantly understood and dealt with in a given place and time'. See Reno, 'Waste and Waste Management', 564.

¹⁰ Reno, 'Your Trash is Someone's Treasure'.

¹¹ As scholars including Emily Brownell, Zsuzsa Gille, Simone Müller, and Kate O'Neill, among others, have done. See Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History*; O'Neill, *Waste Trading Among Rich Nations*; Brownell, 'Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste'.

¹² On the 'Wasteocene', see Marco Armiero and Massimo De Angelis, 'Anthropocene: Victims, Narrators, and Revolutionaries', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116 (Apr. 2017), 348; Marco Armiero, *Wasteocene: Stories from the Global Dump* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), as well as Marco Armiero, 'The Case for the Wasteocene' and the other contributions to the recent forum 'Of Perpetrators and Victims: Toxicity in Environmental History', in *Environmental History*, 26, 3 (Jul. 2021). On connections with the Anthropocene, see Gabrielle Hecht, 'Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence', *Cultural Anthropology*, 33, 1 (2018), 111. On toxicity and the chemically altered world that humans have created, see for example Soraya Boudia and Nathalie Jas, eds., *Powerless Science? Science and Politics in a Toxic World?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Brinda Sarathy et al., *Inevitably Toxic: Historical Perspectives on Contamination, Exposure, and Expertise* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018); Peter C. Little, *Toxic Town: IBM, Pollution, and Industrial Risks* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Brett Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010). See also Michael Egan, 'Toxic Knowledge: A Mercurial Fugue in Three Parts', *Environmental History*, 13, 4 (Oct. 2008); Steve Kroll-Smith and Worth Lancaster, 'Review Article: Bodies, Environments and a New Style of Reasoning', *Annals of the American Academy AAPS*, 594 (Nov. 2002); Michelle Murphy, 'Chemical Regimes of Living', *Environmental History*, 13, 4 (Oct. 2008); Jody A. Roberts and Nancy Langston, 'Toxic Bodies/Toxic Environments: An Interdisciplinary Forum', *Environmental History*, 13, 4 (Oct. 2008); Julia Adeney Thomas, 'History and Biology in the Anthropocene: Problems of Scale, Problems of Value', *The American Historical Review*, 119, 5 (2014).

¹³ Iris Borowy, 'Hazardous Waste: The Beginning of International Organizations Addressing a Growing Global Challenge in the 1970s', *Worldwide Waste: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2, 1 (2019). On the 1980s expansion, see Brownell, 'Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste', 277.

German media as a form of ‘garbage imperialism’, the organising device that David Pellow adopts in his account of how the global trade emerged as a result of stricter environmental regulations in industrialised states; the debt crisis among developing nations; the cost pressures imposed on firms by ‘economic globalisation’; and enduring ‘racist and classist culture and ideology’ that justified foisting toxic burdens on the less fortunate.¹⁴ At the same time, it exemplified what Rob Nixon has characterised as the ‘slow violence of the poor’ and was part of a related process that, as Traci Brynne Voyles has shown, has ‘wasted’ landscapes and livelihoods, nature and human beings (Voyles terms this ‘wastelanding’).¹⁵

In adapting global concepts to national and transnational realities, this article illustrates how, as scholars including Marco Armiero, Alison Frank Johnson, and Lise Fernanda Sedrez have argued, global phenomena can be enacted on local, regional, national and transnational scales.¹⁶ Specifically, the West German-Turkish case skirted the boundaries of, overlapped with, but remained distinct in important ways from broader international and global concepts. The West German-Turkish waste trade might have hewed to Ann Laura Stoler’s definition of a ‘contemporary zone of imperial duress’, even if Turkey and West Germany were not linked by imperial ties, at least not in a formal sense and (by the 1980s) not in recent decades.¹⁷ German-Turkish relations were undoubtedly unequal – with Turkey reliant on West Germany for remittances (from Turkish guest workers) as its primary export market, and as one of its largest sources of foreign aid.¹⁸ Yet this transnational inequality was fundamentally different than that between former colonies and metropolises. Turkey was, in a sense, in Europe but not of Europe – a country whose ‘European’ vocation had been contested over decades and centuries but that remained institutionally anchored in the capitalist West as the bulwark of NATO’s eastern flank and as an associate (and aspiring) member state of the European Economic Community (EEC).¹⁹ This ambiguity mattered, since the (relative) institutional equality between West Germany and Turkey helped channel Turkish opposition into the sphere of transnational legal and regulatory relations and, ultimately, placed the counter-offensive of waste dealers into the shadows and margins of regulatory reforms and legal loopholes.

As a whole, this article grapples with a system that was more than the sum of its parts. It was perceived to be (and clearly *was*) unequal and problematic, yet it was readily exploited by opportunistic toxic waste traders because of its complex, changing and polycentric nature, rather than because of any purposeful design on the part of policy makers. Power and intentionality were frequently discrepant forces in this story. While there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the trade resulted from any explicit plan on the part of West German policy makers to export the country’s toxic waste, West German and Turkish officials alike were aware of and often complicit in perpetuating the trade’s existence, even as it changed. This system might have reflected unequal power relations; yet it was defined by a logic that was neither purely intentional nor accidental – one in which the waste dealers were the primary actors, but were often (tacitly) aided and abetted by the very policy makers who openly

¹⁴ David N. Pellow, *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 8–9. Jennifer Clapp also notes that ‘pollution control costs’ rose in tandem with ‘more stringent regulations’, which prompted firms in the United States and Europe to evade these costs by exporting toxic waste to developing nations. See Jennifer Clapp, *Toxic Exports: The Transfer of Hazardous Wastes from Rich to Poor Countries* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 109.

¹⁵ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Marco Armiero and Lise Fernanda Sedrez, ‘Introduction’, in Marco Armiero and Lisa Sedrez, eds., *A History of Environmentalism: Local Struggles, Global Histories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Alison Frank Johnson, ‘Europe without Borders: Environmental and Global History in a World after Continents’, *Contemporary European History*, 31, 1 (2022).

¹⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Introduction’ in Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 19; Reno, *Military Waste*.

¹⁸ On Turkish-German relations in the years leading up to these scandals, see Tim Szatkowski, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die Türkei, 1978 bis 1983* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016).

¹⁹ Mehmet Döşemeci, *Debating Turkish Modernity: Civilization, Nationalism, and the EEC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

expressed their desire to rein in this unseemly trade.²⁰ By examining the trade in the ways it was understood by disparate groups in Turkey and West Germany alike, this article reveals a changing system – on both sides of the 1988 shift in waste regimes – whose morally problematic existence was facilitated by its complex, opaque and frequently indecipherable character. Particularly in the face of rapid change, this very opacity opened up new avenues of resistance, but did so in a way that was accessible to all, including the waste dealers themselves.

'Big Clean'

To Turkish commentators, the country's emerging position as a destination for hazardous substances from Western Europe highlighted how, as they fell victim to what was roundly criticised in Turkey and elsewhere as 'garbage colonialism' (*çöp kolonyalizmi*), the former Ottoman heartlands had become the object of a new type of foreign influence that was eerily reminiscent of older forms of informal colonial domination.²¹ If the waste trade highlighted the developmental divide between West Germany and Turkey to Turkish journalists and politicians, West German waste dealers explicitly claimed to help Turkey overcome it with a novel form of economic development assistance, as Turkey's signal toxic waste scandal of late 1987 and 1988 would reveal.

The scandal emerged from a project overseen by the aptly if accidentally named Big Clean (*Büyüktemiz*) company, which was part of the group that K. A. Gourlay identified in the early 1990s as the central actors of the toxic waste trade – an assemblage of actors that comprised 'middlemen, the entrepreneurs, adventurers or corruptible politicians who are prepared to organize the collection, shipping, importation and ultimate disposal of the waste'.²² *Büyüktemiz* was merely the surname of the family that owned the business, rather than its (supposed) purpose, a darkly ironic twist on the cliché that, for some, a name is destiny.²³ The family patriarch, Mehmet *Büyüktemiz*, was a Turkish lieutenant who worked for the West German air force at a NATO radar station near *Kütahya*, a small town in the Western Anatolian interior known in Turkey for its porcelain production. A soldier with a foreboding, cowboy-like presence who, according to one report, marched around with a pistol in a holster, *Büyüktemiz* had shifted his attention in recent years from air defence against communist invaders to the toxic waste trade, generally dumping imported refuse in decommissioned coal mines.²⁴

²⁰ Not unlike Gabrielle Hecht's investigation of uranium production in South Africa, in which Hecht has shown, for example, how technopolitical mechanisms that reflected 'deliberate decisions' were embedded in pre-existing power relations, rather than being clearly articulated as intentional, goal-oriented policies. See Gabrielle Hecht, 'The Work of Invisibility: Radiation Hazards and Occupational Health in South African Uranium Production', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 81 (Spring 2012), 94–5.

²¹ 'Çöp kolonyalizmi', *Milliyet*, 19 Jun. 1988. On the historical context, within a vast literature, see Christopher Clay, *Gold for the Sultan: Western Bankers and Ottoman Finance, 1856–1881* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Haydar Kazgan, *Osmanlıda Avrupa Finans Kapitali* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995); Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881–1908. Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983); Şevket Pamuk, *Uneven Centuries: Economic Development of Turkey since 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) and *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913. Trade, Investment and Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Edhem Eldem, *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir and Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Maurits van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls, and Beraths in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). On the ways that development in the 1980s built on earlier colonial relations, see Aram Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History: From Colonialism to the Sustainable Development Goals* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

²² K. A. Gourlay, *World of Waste: Dilemmas of Industrial Development* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 14.

²³ One journalist noted that *Büyüktemiz*'s name was a clear misnomer, the exact opposite of what the firm does. See 'Çöp kolonyalizmi', *Milliyet*, 19 Jun. 1988.

²⁴ 'Giftmüll. Irrfahrt am Bosphorus', *Stern*, 2 Nov. 1988. The commentary, 'Pressereferat, Betr.: MS Petersberg, Bezug: Veröffentlichung des Stern über Kontamination der Ladung, Kontakte mit BMW, AA', 2 Nov. 2, 1988, B295/17596, BArch, refuted some of the article's claims, but not the details about *Büyüktemiz* himself.

The ‘Big Clean’ proposal highlighted the straightforward, if problematic, logic behind shipping waste to Turkey: rural Anatolia needed to be industrialised, and industrialisation required capital.²⁵ Foreign aid provided one solution to this problem, but the demand for capital outstripped the supply of development assistance, particularly at a time of stagnant and even declining Western aid budgets.²⁶ In response, the firm and its Western European partners devised a workaround. The Büyüktemiz company, which was owned by the Büyüktemiz family together with the Turkish government and a West German engineering group, would source toxic waste from West German industry – particularly from states like Baden-Württemberg that were home to only a limited number of disposal facilities.²⁷ The revenues resulting from toxic waste receipts would then be used to finance the Göltaş cement factory outside the southwestern city of Isparta and to build a ‘special disposal facility’ in the Western Anatolian town of Tavşanlı, in Kütahya province. This occurred, moreover, at a time when Turkey was not only increasingly indebted and reliant on foreign capital investment, but when the country’s waste regime was beginning to embark on a shift from a more informal system to one that relied on larger, more formal dumping sites.²⁸ As part of this process, not unlike marginalised areas across the globe, cheap land values and low population density in Western Anatolia attracted waste exporters who packaged their product as a promissory note and vehicle for investment.²⁹

The details of the Tavşanlı-Isparta project were self-servingly technical and opaque, but the pitch to local politicians was straightforward. The cement factory in Isparta wasn’t the project’s ultimate goal; instead, it was merely an intermediate step towards the construction of a much larger ‘transformer factory’, which would create 2,000 much-needed local jobs.³⁰ Büyüktemiz’s partners on the export side were Faktum and Weber, the Swiss and West German companies that sourced ‘sellers’ of toxic waste among industrial concerns in Central and Western Europe (though, in financial terms, they were *buyers* since they paid to offload their waste). Besides acting as intermediaries, Faktum and Weber also contributed to the developmentalist credentials of the project. They boasted of an investment package worth ‘billions of dollars’ that would act as a catalyst to industrialise poor inland areas of southwestern Anatolia.³¹ To lend credibility, Faktum, the waste exporter, masqueraded as an investor in industrial development, not just as a buyer and seller of industrial waste. The company’s CEO, Wolfgang Honold, later claimed to West German authorities that his firm’s primary role was to help Western European countries build factories and outsource operations to developing countries in order to reduce costs and help bring prosperity to foreign lands. At Isparta, Faktum’s clients had hired the company to lay the groundwork for a tractor factory (the story about what type of factory would be built, and even where, changed frequently), which was to be ‘transferred’ from central

²⁵ For the general context, see Şeref Saygılı, Cengiz Cihan, and Hasan Yurtoğlu, *Türkiye Ekonomisinde Sermaye Birikimi, Büyüme ve Verimlilik, 1972–2003* (Ankara: Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 2005).

²⁶ With the proviso that precise aid flows were difficult to calculate, even for policy makers overseeing aid budgets, an article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* suggested that 1988 was the *first* time in the postwar era that Western aid flows declined in real, inflation-adjusted terms. See ‘Westen gibt erstmals weniger Entwicklungshilfe’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 17 Dec. 1988, B.II.1, 1969, AGG.

²⁷ ‘INGAR Ing.- und Architektur-Büro [Stuttgart]. Exposé. Problem Müllentsorgung und Endlagerung in der Türkei’, 1 Jun. 1987, B295/17614, BArch. West Germany’s most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, also had a lack of ‘suitable’ disposal facilities. See ‘Intermerc GmbH, Entwicklungs- und Verkaufsgesellschaft für Industrieprodukte, an alle Regierungspräsidenten des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Betr.: Entsorgung von Industriefällen und Sondermüll’, 6 Apr. 1988, B295/17614, BArch.

²⁸ Gül Tuçaltan, ‘Informalization of Waste Regimes: The Entanglement of Urbanization, Poverty and Waste in Ankara’, in Onur Inal and Ethemcan Turhan, eds., *Transforming Socio-Natures in Turkey: Landscapes, State and Environmental Movements* (London: Routledge, 2020).

²⁹ Joshua Reno highlights how this dynamic encompassed both toxic waste and other types of investment. See ‘Beyond Risk: Emplacement and the Production of Environmental Evidence’, *American Ethnologist*, 38, 3 (2011), 520. Brownell, ‘Negotiating the New Economic Order of Waste’, 278 details similar American efforts to donate incinerators to Caribbean recipients of US toxic waste exports.

³⁰ ‘Tavşanlı will den deutschen Giftmüll nicht’, *Tageszeitung*, 3 Mar. 1988; ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988, B.II.1, 6374, AGG.

³¹ ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988, B.II.1, 6374, AGG.

Europe to western Anatolia, alongside a coal liquefaction plant belonging to a 'large petrochemical company'.³²

In Faktum's misleading account, building a toxic waste dump would help Turkish officials overcome two stumbling blocks on the path to building the transformer factory (or tractor or cement or coal liquefaction plant). First, industrial sites generated waste, and a large factory couldn't be built responsibly without first designing local disposal facilities. Second, since capital-intensive industrial sites in poor agricultural areas tended not to be an attractive prospect for commercial banks, obtaining sufficient (hard currency) financing would be challenging. Building a toxic waste dump promised to solve both problems at once. It would ensure that there was a final resting place for the refuse generated by the factory that was promised (but never built). More importantly, in the short term, it would also plug the financing gap, since the fees generated by West German waste exports would provide the hard currency that the project might otherwise never obtain. Faktum would import non-radioactive toxic waste from abroad, store it briefly, and dump it in facilities built with the revenue from foreign 'waste disposal fees'.³³ Faktum's explanation was undoubtedly self-serving, but it was also compelling. Turkish politicians were desperate for industrial jobs and were searching for alternatives to traditional lending at a time of mounting debt.³⁴

Toxic waste, in Faktum's vision, replaced old-fashioned loans: rather than agreeing to pay back West German lenders, the Turks would merely have to accept staggering quantities of West German waste. Weber, the West German waste exporter, would collect the waste from various German industrial firms and repackage it as 'fuel'. To do so, it had signed an agreement with the Turkish authorities, and had obtained a special export licence from the local authorities in the town of Göppingen, to export 100,000 tons of West German industrial waste to a 200,000 square-meter dump site between fall 1987 and the end of the decade.³⁵ The scale of the (real) waste dwarfed the illusory, promised factory it was supposed to serve. Together, Büyüktemiz and Weber were laying the groundwork to export refuse roughly equivalent in weight to 250 jumbo jets or ten Eiffel Towers, to a site the size of New York's Grand Central Station.³⁶

The Faktum-Weber-Büyüktemiz sales pitch was couched in the supposed normalcy of the export business conducted by companies who boasted highly 'reputable' credentials – 'reputable' in the sense that their priorities and values made them trustworthy to investors in Western Europe. Weber Industry and City Cleaning helped major West German corporations like Siemens, Bosch, and Daimler Benz dispose of their industrial waste. The company claimed that its export product consisted solely in 'recyclable materials' (*Wertstoff*) and boasted to authorities that it was even being *paid* by its Turkish business partners for its supposedly valuable export (the latter claim appears to have reflected an accounting sleight of hand).³⁷ Büyüktemiz also traded on the legitimacy afforded by its exclusive license, obtained from the Turkish authorities, to import any sort of non-radioactive waste originating in Western Europe or North America to the Tavşanlı waste site (and to store the waste in the company's warehouse at the Izmir harbour during transit).³⁸ As the officially endorsed Turkish steward of the project, Büyüktemiz was responsible not only for running the disposal facilities, but also for

³² 'Wolfgang Honold, Geschäftsführer, Faktum, Internationale Handels AG, Fahrweid (CH), 18.3.1988, Betreff: Abfallentsorgung Türkei', B295/17614, BArch.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For the general context, see Ziya Öniş and Steven Webb, *Political Economy of Policy Reform in Turkey in the 1980s* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1992) and Ali Coşkun Tunçer, *Sovereign Debt and International Financial Control: the Middle East and the Balkans* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Greenpeace (Hamburg), 'Internationaler Müllhandel: Europa und der Mittlere Osten', B.II.1, 999, AGG; 'Fern in der Türkei, wo der Giftmüll brennt...', *Tageszeitung*, 2 Feb. 1988, Die Grünen im EP, B.IV.2, 1299, AGG.

³⁷ 'Betr.: Verbringung von Abfällen in die Türkei, Bezug: Telefonat mit Herrn Dunz, Umweltministerium Stuttgart am 16.2.1988', 16 Feb. 1988, B295/17614 BArch.

³⁸ The licence itself is available in the German Federal Archives: 'Özel karakterli bertaraf edilecek malzemeler için ithal müsaadesi', 23 Sep. 1987, B295/17614, BArch. See also 'INGAR Ing.- und Architektur-Büro (Stuttgart). Exposé. Problem Müllentsorgung und Endlagerung in der Türkei', 1 Jun. 1987, B 295/17614, BArch.

importing, transporting and disposing of the waste, or for selling it on to other dealers in Turkey. As Semra Büyüktemiz, the family matriarch, nonchalantly characterised her business to a journalist, this was a trade like any other: ‘we import waste and chemical waste from Europe, especially from [West] Germany ... [and] we process it and use it in coal production’.³⁹ Büyüktemiz, Weber, and Faktum also relied on one other ‘reputable’ firm. The West German group, EVA, one of the oldest waste exporters in Europe (which began exporting West German waste to France in 1952), would both contribute to the ‘replacement fuel’ (i.e. it would export waste) and act as a financial intermediary for the resulting payments. According to Turkish newspaper reports, EVA had agreed to pay an undisclosed fee, via Büyüktemiz, to the final recipients of the waste in Turkey (which in some but not all cases would have been Büyüktemiz itself).⁴⁰

In the autumn of 1987, with no sign of hard hats or earth movers, Weber sent an initial shipment of around 1500 tons of euphemistically named ‘replacement fuel’ (*Ersatzbrennstoff*) from its base in the southwestern German state of Baden-Württemberg to the cement factory at Isparta, where the ‘fuel’ would be burned (or disposed of).⁴¹ The project erupted into a scandal in Turkey and West Germany when it became clear that toxic waste was the *sole* purpose of the project, not an intermediate step in the service of building a factory and creating industrial jobs. In February 1988 a joint investigation undertaken by West German journalists working for the *Tageszeitung* (TAZ), a newspaper close to the Green Party, and Turkish journalists at *Cumhuriyet* unearthed the unsettling reality beneath the project’s official veneer.⁴² The harmless-sounding ‘replacement fuel’ being used at the cement factory was actually composed of toxic waste, including cyanide and the chlorine-derived poisons dichloromethane and dichloroethylene. If they were handled improperly, they could easily produce the lethal dioxin 2,4,5-t.⁴³ The Tavşanlı factory also emitted levels of PCBs that were six times higher than commonly accepted international limits and almost thirty times greater than West Germany’s more stringent (and recently adopted) standard.⁴⁴ Equally troubling, Weber appeared to have been drawn to Turkey by the country’s ‘heavenly conditions for the disposal of toxic waste’.⁴⁵ The head of the factory, Yılmaz Kasap, was especially blunt when he noted to a *Cumhuriyet* journalist that ‘the Germans were overly sensitive about pollution ... [and] even have a party called the “Greens”’. Turkey, on the other hand, was (in Kasap’s words) a ‘backwards developing country’ that didn’t need to trouble itself with the finer points of environmental protection.⁴⁶ What had attracted Weber to Turkey was painfully obvious to Istanbul’s self-proclaimed ‘garbage king’, Osman Söyler. Söyler was adamant that, if the Isparta waste were as harmless as its West German exporters claimed, they wouldn’t have exported it in the first place.⁴⁷ The ‘replacement fuel’ label was a ruse.

³⁹ ‘Zehirli çöpe Kütahya’dan meydan okuma. Semra Hanım da çöp ithal edecek’, *Milliyet*, 28 Feb. 1988.

⁴⁰ ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988.

⁴¹ ‘İthal çöpte oyun bozuldu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 2 Mar. 1988 cited 1581 tons of imported industrial waste. Estimates varied but were generally in the range of 1500–1600 tons. See also ‘Giffässer aus der BRD verseuchen Schwarzmeerküste’, *Tageszeitung*, 22 Aug. 1988, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG.

⁴² ‘Giffässer aus der BRD verseuchen Schwarzmeerküste’, *Tageszeitung*, 22 Aug. 1988, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG.

⁴³ Greenpeace (Hamburg), ‘Internationaler Müllhandel: Europa und der Mittlere Osten’, B.II.1, 999, AGG; ‘Giffässer aus der BRD verseuchen Schwarzmeerküste’, *Tageszeitung*, 22 Aug. 1988, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, B.IV.2, AGG.

⁴⁴ ‘Türkische Botschaft Bonn, An das Landratsamt Göppingen, Amt Umweltschutz’, 28 Apr. 1988, B295/17614, BArch. ‘Alman çöpi sakıncalı’, *Milliyet*, 10 Mar. 1988, and ‘Giffässer aus der BRD verseuchen Schwarzmeerküste’, *Tageszeitung*, 22 Aug. 1988, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG. See also ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988.

⁴⁵ ‘Fern in der Türkei, wo der Giftmüll brennt...’, *Tageszeitung*, 8 Feb. 1988, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, B.IV.2, AGG.

⁴⁶ ‘Çöp ihracı yeni sömürgecilik’, *Cumhuriyet*, 25 Mar. 1988, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG.

⁴⁷ ‘Çöp yerine işleme fabrikası ithal edildi’, *Milliyet*, 18 Feb. 1988. The relevant quotes from the Istanbul garbage king, Osman Söyler, are: ‘The Germans are sending garbage to us because it is harmful’ (‘Almanlar çöpleri zararlı olduğu için bize gönderiyorlar’); and ‘Europeans are very conscious about garbage’ (‘Avrupa insanı çöp konusunda çok bilinçli’).

Nevertheless, it was a lie coated in a veneer of safety and legality. At least in theory, West Germany didn't allow the country's companies simply to foist their toxic refuse on foreigners. Indeed, the West German federal government's official policy was that waste had to be dealt with at home, unless absolutely necessary – as was the case in states like Baden-Württemberg in the southwest that lacked sufficient disposal capabilities.⁴⁸ Waste exports were to be reserved for 'exceptional' cases.⁴⁹ The problem was that this exception pierced a gaping hole in the entire regulatory framework, since it made an illegal practice perfectly legal under the right circumstances – and numerous firms were adept at identifying such exceptions. While some West German firms became experts at finding loopholes, others flouted the rules entirely, since 'uncontrolled and unprofessional disposal' abroad was cheaper and easier than disposing of it at home.⁵⁰ There was little question as to who would win when savvy traders were pitted against a verification process that relied, essentially, on the honour system.

At the same time, West German legality in the domain of toxic waste exports was a fiction created and reinforced in part by the Turkish authorities' lax enforcement of its own rules. The local regulatory office in Göppingen (in the southwestern German state of Baden-Württemberg), for instance, had certified Weber's 'replacement fuel' export based on the assumption that the Isparta cement factory was able to burn it safely and effectively. Without this assurance, Weber's export from West Germany would have been illegal. This assumption concerning the factory's disposal capabilities, in turn, was based on documents tendered to the Göppingen office by the Isparta Chamber of Commerce, which, however, merely reflected Büyüktemiz's own false assertions. It later emerged that the factory lacked the facilities to purify *any* of its own emissions or waste products – not just toxic ones.⁵¹ When tested by scientists at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, the plant's emissions turned out to contain high levels of PCBs and other contaminants that would not have been present if the appropriate purification facilities had been available.⁵² On the Turkish side, the Isparta Chamber's faith in the project was bolstered by Büyüktemiz's promise that the company's facilities would not only follow Turkish law but would also meet all 'German, European and American' environmental and public health standards (a category so broad as to be meaningless), as certified by an internationally recognised team of experts.⁵³ The West German legal export, authorised by the local office in Göppingen, in short, was not only based on doctored documents and false authorisations provided by the Turkish authorities; it was rooted in a chain of questionable claims that ultimately originated with Büyüktemiz itself.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ On the need to avoid 'waste tourism', see 'Staatssekretär, Bundesminister für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit, an den Chef der Hessischen Staatskanzlei Herrn Dr. Alexander Gauland', 2 Nov. 1987. On states like Baden-Württemberg sidestepping such efforts, see 'Betr.: Verbringung von Abfällen in die Türkei, Bezug: Telefonat mit Herrn Dunz, Umweltministerium Stuttgart am 16.2.1988', 16 Feb. 1988, both in B295/17614, BArch.

⁴⁹ 'Staatssekretär, Bundesminister für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit, an den Chef der Hessischen Staatskanzlei Herrn Dr. Alexander Gauland', 2 Nov. 1987, B295/17614, BArch. In a curious connection between the waste saga and the roots of anti-migrant politics in post-unification Germany, the recipient of this document, Alexander Gauland, would later go on to co-found and serve as leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD).

⁵⁰ 'Staatssekretär, Bundesminister für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit, an den Chef der Hessischen Staatskanzlei Herrn Dr. Alexander Gauland', 2 Nov. 1987, B295/17614, BArch.

⁵¹ 'Pressemitteilung Nr. 29/88 der Grünen im Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, 10.2.1988. Grüne protestieren gegen Giftmüllverschiebung in die Türkei'; 'Pressemitteilung Nr. 35/88 der Grünen im Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, 23.2.1988. Giftmüllexport in die Türkei: Grüne fordern Landesregierung zur Stellungnahme auf'; 'Pressemitteilung Nr. 54/88 der Grünen im Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, 11.3.1988', B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG. There are numerous additional documents on this subject in B.II.1, 910, AGG.

⁵² As detailed in a report by the University of Ankara in Feb. 1988, cit. in 'Alman çöpü sakıncalı', *Milliyet*, 10 Mar. 1988, and 'Giffässer aus der BRD versuchen Schwarzmeerküste', *Tageszeitung*, 22 Aug. 1988, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG. See also 'Zehirli çöp oyunu', *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988.

⁵³ Letter, Turkish Minister of Health to Büyüktemiz, 21 Dec. 1987, B295/17614, BArch.

⁵⁴ Greenpeace (Hamburg), 'Internationaler Müllhandel: Europa und der Mittlere Osten', B.II.1, 999, AGG.

As a result of the scandal unleashed by the *Tageszeitung-Cumhuriyet* investigation, the regional authorities of Kütahya revoked the factory's operating licence in early March 1988.⁵⁵ Their justification was that the Turkish authorities had been 'knowingly misled' into accepting thirty-five tons of toxic waste on a trial basis in September 1987, followed by another 1581 tons in December 1987.⁵⁶ Fevzi Coşkun, the mayor of Tavşanlı, the town that hosted the Büyüktemiz disposal facility, lamented that he had been betrayed and defrauded.⁵⁷ Büyüktemiz, Faktum, and Weber were equally outraged, though for diametrically opposed reasons. Wolfgang Honold, Faktum's CEO, wondered out loud whether the Turkish authorities 'understood Turkish', since 'the Turks [had] granted us a general import license, to import special waste [*Sondermüll*] of any type in unlimited quantities, excluding radioactive material'. As agreed, the West Germans hadn't exported any radioactive waste, so what was the problem? Didn't the Turks still want to host the 'industrial megaproject' that had supposedly been sponsored by the 'highest levels' of the West German government – a claim that the project's boosters never abandoned?⁵⁸ Dieter Weber feigned confusion as to why toxic waste exports had been singled out from the country's other exports to Turkey: 'we [Germans] export Daimler and BMW [cars and trucks] to Turkey, so why not "replacement fuel from special waste"?'⁵⁹ Exports were exports.

The scandal also had more far-reaching consequences. In the region of Isparta, the cement factory saga prompted a debate about the toxic effects of economic development in a country that had long been dependent on the West for capital and technology. The affair provided supporters of Prime Minister Turgut Özal's market-friendly, neoliberal Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) with a moral high horse on matters of industrial safety, despite its welcoming attitude towards foreign investment and multinational corporations. Özal, one of the principal architects of Turkey's pro-business, neoliberal turn following the country's 1980 military coup, became personally involved and attempted to isolate the waste scandal from his government's openness towards foreign capital.⁶⁰ The problem, he argued, wasn't the system; it was a handful of criminals, whom he would bring to justice. After visiting the cement factory, Özal insisted to the mayor of Isparta that the toxic waste be removed from the city and burned elsewhere. His involvement, those close to him suggested, was sufficient to solve the problem. Helpfully to the Turkish authorities, it also justified police removal of environmentalist protesters from near the site: if the prime minister was taking care of the matter, there was no need for demonstrations.⁶¹

In a public forum in Isparta in late February 1988, dubbed the 'garbage debate' (*çöp tartışması*) by Turkish media, the local members of Özal's party used the scandal to score political points at the expense of one of their main political opponents, the Demirel family. It was helpful to Özal that Şevket Demirel had not only approved the project as head of the Isparta Chamber of Commerce, but that he also happened to be the brother of former Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, the current

⁵⁵ 'Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Frau Garbe und der Fraktion Die Grünen. Giftmüllverbringung nach Afrika (Drucksache 11/2475, 13.06.88)', B295/17546, BArch.

⁵⁶ 'Zehirli çöp oyunu', *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988; 'Tavşanlı will den deutschen Giftmüll nicht', *Tageszeitung*, 3 Mar. 1988, B.II.1, 6374, AGG. The operating licence was from 20 Nov. 1987: see 'Wolfgang Honold, Geschäftsführer, Faktum, Internationale Handels AG, Fahrweid (CH), 18.3.1988, Betreff: Abfallentsorgung Türkei', B295/17614, BArch.

⁵⁷ 'Zehirli çöp oyunu', *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988. The Tavşanlı district president, Coşkun is mistakenly referred to as 'Revzi Cosgun' and incorrectly identified as the mayor of Isparta (a similar but not identical position to Coşkun's) in 'Tavşanlı will den deutschen Giftmüll nicht', *Tageszeitung*, 3 Mar. 1988, B.II.1, 6374, AGG.

⁵⁸ 'Tavşanlı will den deutschen Giftmüll nicht', *Tageszeitung*, 3 Mar. 1988, B.II.1, 6374, AGG.

⁵⁹ 'Giftmüll aus deutschen Landen für türkische Öfen', *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, B.IV.2, Die Grünen im EP, 1299, AGG. The original term is 'Ersatzbrennstoff aus Sonderabfall'.

⁶⁰ Ziya Öniş, 'Turgut Özal and His Economic Legacy: Turkish Neo-Liberalism in Critical Perspective', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40, 4 (2004); Fikret Şenses, 'Turkey's Experience with Neoliberal Policies since 1980 in Retrospect and Prospect', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 47, 47 (2012); Erol Taymaz and Ebru Voyvoda, 'Marching to the Beat of a Late Drummer: Turkey's Experience of Neoliberal Industrialization since 1980', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 47, 47 (2012).

⁶¹ 'Zehirli çöp başka yerde yakılsın', *Milliyet*, 15 Mar. 1988.

general president of the opposition, centre-right Democrat Party. The Motherland Party's local representatives grilled Şevket Demirel, asking why he hadn't favoured removing the waste from the Isparta region and then destroying it. Did he condone poisoning people? The responses from Demirel's party colleagues highlighted the official thinking behind Turkey's toxic waste imports. Importing garbage was a justified 'economic practice' (*ekonomik bir uygulama*) and the plant was able to process the fuel without damage to the local environment. In this rendering, the saga was indeed emblematic of the system as a whole – but the whole affair, like the system it was part of, was 'no problem for Isparta'.⁶² This skilful tactical move placed Demirel's party into an awkward position: in order to defend their role as stewards of the scandal-plagued Isparta cement factory (since Şevket had supplied false documentation to obtain the export approval from the West German authorities), they also had to justify an entire system of openness to foreign capital that was part and parcel of Özal's neoliberal reforms.

As the scandal intensified, Veysel Atasoy, the Turkish minister of state responsible for the environment, filed criminal charges on the grounds that the import certifications were imprecise. Atasoy summed up the prevailing mood to reporters: 'we don't want garbage from [West Germany]'. The mayor of Istanbul, Dalan, also asserted that 'we're not a dump for German toxic waste . . . everyone should deal with their own garbage'.⁶³ The Environment Ministry in Baden-Württemberg, where Weber was based and where much if not all of the waste originated, acknowledged that the south-western state's important 'Turkey [waste] export' was in crisis. The scandal had shown that Baden-Württemberg needed to build new facilities, including an incineration plant, to dispose of its own toxic waste without relying on exports to places like Turkey.⁶⁴

The public outrage surrounding the Isparta scandal swiftly put an end to Turkey's (legal) involvement in the toxic waste trade, since it led the Turkish Parliament to ban the import of 'all types of industrial waste' on 3 March 1988.⁶⁵ As the Turkish, West German, and Austrian publics were to discover in the summer of 1988, however, the new Turkish law didn't end the toxic waste trade, but merely pushed it underground, thanks to a loophole that continued to allow the import of household garbage (a trade that continues to thrive in the 2020s). Turkey had merely banned *industrial* waste – and had implemented a 'warning system' that required importers to sign an attestation declaring that their cargo would not be considered environmentally harmful in its home country.⁶⁶ This new honour system was, unsurprisingly, no match for savvy waste dealers like Büyüktemiz. As the Turkish state minister responsible for the environment, Adnan Kahveci, was well aware, Turkey's efforts to prevent the import of toxic waste continued to be thwarted by the international 'garbage mafia' (*çöp mafya*) that had been exposed at the Tavşanlı cement factory.⁶⁷ Even after the failure of the Isparta cement factory project, Büyüktemiz continued to find foreign clients and operate disposal facilities in Anatolia, despite the greater scrutiny, political attention and legal action that the toxic waste trade now attracted.

The St. Florian Principle and a 'Death Ship' in the Black Sea

In a spectacular case that quickly devolved into an international incident in the summer of 1988, Turkey's new 'warning system' left a West German freighter adrift in the Black Sea. The *Petersberg*

⁶² 'Çöp tartışması', *Milliyet*, 25 Feb. 1988.

⁶³ 'Tavşanlı will den deutschen Giftmüll nicht', *Tageszeitung*, 3 Mar. 1988, B.II.1, 6374, AGG.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Greenpeace (Hamburg), 'Internationaler Müllhandel: Europa und der Mittlere Osten', B.II.1, 999, AGG. This was part of a wider trend that saw over 90 developing nations outlaw toxic waste imports between 1986 and 1993, as noted by Brownell, 278.

⁶⁶ 'Devlet Bakanı Kahveci açıkladı İthal çöp için üç önlem horyet'e bilgi verdi', *Cumhuriyet*, 3 Jul. 1988. On Kahveci's measures to restrict toxic waste imports, see also 'Zehirli çöp oyunu', *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988. For the broader context, see Greenpeace (Hamburg), 'Internationaler Müllhandel: Europa und der Mittlere Osten', B.II.1, 999, AGG.

⁶⁷ 'Devlet Bakanı Kahveci açıkladı İthal çöp için üç önlem horyet'e bilgi verdi', *Cumhuriyet*, 3 Jul. 1988. See also 'Çöp mafya işi', *Milliyet*, 1 Aug. 1989; Greenpeace (Hamburg), 'Internationaler Müllhandel: Europa und der Mittlere Osten', B.II.1, 999, AGG.

was a relatively small, somewhat decrepit vessel that had been chartered from the Danish Nielsen shipping company and subsequently rented out to the Bavarian Lloyd of Regensburg (which, in turn, belonged to the large West German energy consortium Veba).⁶⁸ It had been commissioned by a Viennese waste exporter, Reinhard Göschl, to transport around 1200 tons of waste from a construction site outside Vienna down the Danube, across the Black Sea and through the Bosphorus to the Turkish port city of Izmit, along the Marmara coast near Istanbul.⁶⁹ In mid-May, a Nielsen shipping agent loaded the ship with this ‘contaminated soil’ in the Vienna harbour.⁷⁰ On 18 May, the ship’s captain, Günter Großjahn, who owned and operated the *Petersberg*, set sail down the Danube en route to Turkey.⁷¹ Upon its arrival in the Turkish port of Derince, near Izmit on the Marmara Sea, the ship was boarded by customs and dock officials, and sequestered on suspicion of carrying radioactive waste. Its intended recipient, Büyüktemiz, refused to accept the cargo, although it soon became apparent that Büyüktemiz might have raised a red flag when it failed to file the necessary paper work (or neglected to bribe the right officials, in one account).⁷² The firms that had sold the cargo to Büyüktemiz were Faktum, which, like Büyüktemiz, had also been involved in the Isparta affair, and another waste exporter, Nobila.⁷³ While Büyüktemiz himself would end up in jail for fraud over the course of the summer of 1988, the *Petersberg* affair was not a story of justice served.⁷⁴ Instead, the stranded vessel showcased how savvy actors like Büyüktemiz, his Western business associates, and even European states like West Germany and Austria were able to exploit the complexity of overlapping legal jurisdictions and the unknowability of their cargoes to circumvent the attempts of states like Turkey to ban hazardous imports.⁷⁵

After its arrival at the Marmara port of Derince, the *Petersberg*’s cargo appeared to be trapped on the ship – and couldn’t be transported, as planned, to a Büyüktemiz disposal site in central Turkey.⁷⁶ In early June, Turkish officials accused the ship’s owner of illicitly transporting radioactive materials. Shortly thereafter, the story leaked to the Turkish press, which reported that the test results obtained by an Istanbul laboratory had revealed that the waste was radioactive.⁷⁷ Just months after the Isparta scandal, Turkey had become the recipient of more unwanted toxic waste from West Germany, which now sat on an anchored ‘death ship’ (*ölüm gemi*), as local

⁶⁸ ‘Bundesministerium für Verkehr, See 13/26.40.70-10, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff “Petersberg”’, 6 Oct. 1988, B 295/17596, BArch. In one contemporary account, Gourlay, *World of Waste*, 1, the global trade was likewise described in terms of decay: ‘dilapidated ships . . . [carrying a] rapidly deteriorating cargo’.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Description of incident by Nielsen Shipping & Trading GmbH, untitled document, dated 17 Aug. 1988, addressed to ‘Rudolf Seiters, MdB und 1er parlam. Geschäftsführer der CDU/CSU, Bonn’ (Rudolf Seiters, Member of Parliament and First Parliamentary President of the CDU/CSU, Bonn), B295/17595, BArch. The report refers to ‘contaminated soil’ (‘kontaminierte Erde’).

⁷¹ The timeline relies on the Nielsen Shipping agency’s testimony to the West German Parliament, cited in the previous footnote and archived in B295/17595, BArch, as well as on *Cumhuriyet* interviews with customs and dock officials in Izmit in ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988.

⁷² Description of incident by Nielsen Shipping & Trading GmbH, untitled document, dated 17 Aug. 1988, addressed to ‘Rudolf Seiters, MdB und 1er parlam. Geschäftsführer der CDU/CSU, Bonn’ (Rudolf Seiters, Member of Parliament and First Parliamentary President of the CDU/CSU, Bonn), B295/17595, BArch; ‘Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Referat See 13/26.40.70-10-01/88, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschen Schiffen im Cross Trade MS “Petersberg”’, 6 Oct. 1988; ‘Bundesministerium für Verkehr. See 13/26.40.70-10. Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff “Petersberg”’, 6 Oct. 1988, B 295/17596, BArch.

⁷³ ‘Zur information. Die botschaft wien teilt mit’, 18 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ In West Germany, this case escalated to the highest levels of government, and involved the Federal Chancellor. See the report sent by the Federal Transport Minister to the Head of the Chancellor’s Office, ‘Betr.: Transport gefährlicher Güter mit Schiffen unter deutscher Flagge; hier: Bericht des BMW in der Kabinettsitzung am 21 Sept. 1988; Bezug: Kabinetttvorlage des BMW vom 14.09.1988 – gl. Az.; Ergebnis der heutigen Staatssekretärsbesprechung. (16.9.1988)’, 16 Sep. 1988, B295/17547, BArch. On the international phenomenon of ships carrying toxic waste, see Müller, ‘The “Flying Dutchmen”’.

⁷⁶ ‘Giftmüll. So ein Wirbel’, *Der Spiegel*, 7 Aug. 1988.

⁷⁷ ‘Zehirli çöp oyunu’, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988.

newspapers dubbed the *Petersberg*.⁷⁸ Were the Germans, beset by anxieties over atomic energy, now trying to dump the refuse from their nuclear plants in Turkey? Confronted with this chilling prospect, the customs authorities ordered the ship to leave the country immediately.⁷⁹

West German and Western European officials were blindsided by what they deemed an irrational and hysterical reaction.⁸⁰ They claimed that the cargo's radiation levels, as revealed by the Istanbul test, were 140 Becquerel (Bq) per kilogram, less than half the EEC's upper limit for baby food (370 Bq/kg) and far less radioactive than Viennese cobblestones were in 1988 (1000 Bq/kg).⁸¹ Indeed, these readings were similar to the (elevated) radiation levels found in Austrian and German soil two years after the Chernobyl disaster. West German officials thus considered them to be 'harmless'.⁸² The Turkish authorities were now applying a *more* stringent threshold for radioactive contamination than did West Germany, Austria or the EEC. Europe had become literally more radioactive because of Chernobyl, and in the aftermath of the Isparta scandal the Turks appeared unwilling to tolerate Chernobyl-tainted Viennese soil.

As the subsequent international incident over the *Petersberg* showed, however, the question was never really about how radioactive Viennese cobblestones were. Instead, it concerned the unknowability of waste shipments, which were not just physically hidden in the cargo holds of freighters but were disguised by overlapping and often contradictory categories of legal ownership and liability. When the *Petersberg* attempted to return to Austria in late June, it became trapped in the Black Sea after it was disowned by the Austrian government and subsequently barred transit rights along the Danube.⁸³ The Viennese authorities disclaimed responsibility based on their assessment that the ship itself was (West) German, not Austrian; its problems therefore belonged to Bonn, regardless of the provenance of its cargo.⁸⁴ The West Germans, on the other hand, argued that the problem was the cargo, not the vessel: West Germany wasn't willing to take responsibility for disposing of Austrian waste simply because it happened to be on a German ship.⁸⁵

It remained unclear what would happen to the *Petersberg*, which spent the summer of 1988 stranded in the Black Sea. Food, water and sanitary supplies were running low, and the old vessel began to encounter serious mechanical problems.⁸⁶ The looming fall storms posed an existential threat to the ship and its human occupants.⁸⁷ Moreover, the ship's captain had almost run out of money, although, given that the *Petersberg's* predicament was that nobody wanted its cargo, it was unclear what a bankruptcy would actually entail. A high-ranking Soviet diplomat in Bonn shared his fear

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ 'Giftmüll. So ein Wirbel', *Der Spiegel*, 7 Aug. 1988.

⁸¹ 'Betr.: Deutsches Schiff "MS Petersberg" mit kontaminierter Ladung vor Rumänien', 1 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch. See also 'Giftmüll. So ein Wirbel', *Der Spiegel*, 7 Aug. 1988; 'Geisterschiff wohlauf', *Tageszeitung*, 3 Aug. 1988.

⁸² 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr. See 13/26.40.70-10. Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988, B295, 17596, BArch.

⁸³ 'Betr.: Deutsches Schiff "MS Petersberg" mit kontaminierter Ladung vor Rumänien', 1 Aug. 1988 notes that the topic has occupied German offices up to the highest levels, since it was an 'explosive current foreign policy' matter ('gegenwärtiger außenpolitischer Brisanz des Themas'). See also 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr, See 13/26.40.70-10, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988. Both documents are in B295/17595, BArch. See also 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Referat See 13/26.40.70-10-01/88, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschen Schiffen im Cross Trade MS "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988, B295/17596, BArch.

⁸⁴ 'Betr.: Schifftransporte mit gefährlichen Abfällen (MS Petersberg, MS Karin-B), Bezug: Ressortbesprechung am 25.8.1988, Teilnehmer AA, BMV, BMU, BK', 25 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch.

⁸⁵ 'Betr.: Deutsches Schiff "MS Petersberg" mit kontaminierter Ladung vor Rumänien', 1 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch; 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr, See 13/26.40.70-10, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988, B 295/17596, BArch.

⁸⁶ 'Aus: Istanbul, Nr. 177 von 04.08.1988, 0930, An: Bonn AA, Betr.: MS "Petersberg"', 4 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch; 'Der Bundesminister für Verkehr an Chef des Bundeskanzleramtes Herrn MR Feier, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Schiff "Petersberg" von Wien in die Türkei', 6 Oct. 1988, B 295/17596, BArch.

⁸⁷ 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr. See 13/26.40.70-10. Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988, B295/17596, BArch.

with the West German Environment Ministry that, given the deteriorating conditions on board, the ship's captain might attempt to dump his radioactive cargo at sea.⁸⁸ The West German authorities, meanwhile, feared that the ship would be seized – though it was debatable whether anyone would want to take ownership of what had become, literally, a toxic asset.⁸⁹

The solution that the Austrians began to pursue in autumn 1988 was, at this point, a predictable one – they tried to make the cargo someone else's problem, exactly as the Turks had accused West Germany of doing earlier in the year. Confronted with repeated West German refusals to accept the *Petersberg's* 'Austrian' charge, the Austrian authorities opened negotiations with Egypt and East Germany as possible destinations.⁹⁰ To one Austrian journalist, though, this proposal wasn't just impractical (since the ship's mechanical state made a long journey impossible) but also highlighted how the country's environmental policy seemed to follow an old Austrian proverb known as the 'Florian' principle. Named after St. Florian, the saint who protected against fire and drought, the ironically named proverb referred to the self-centred human tendency, when confronted with an existential threat, to ask St. Florian to 'save my house, and burn down my neighbour's'. Austria, like its larger neighbour to the west, had adapted this principle to its environmental problems. Like West Germany, Austria was able to play the 'model environmental pupil' by exporting its most flagrant environmental hazards abroad. Austria and West Germany had been complicit in doing just that with the *Petersberg's* cargo when a West German company transported Austrian waste to Turkey, and they both sought out a similar solution, though in different locations, after Turkey blocked its import.⁹¹

Unsurprisingly, the significance of the *Petersberg* affair varied depending on which side of St. Florian's ledger a country found itself. To officials from Austria and West Germany, the most pressing questions concerned the political ramifications of corporate ownership, liability and jurisdictional problems. Given that there was no precedent in international law for toxic waste incidents like this, just non-binding guidelines issued by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in 1982, it was unclear which legal principles would apply, and on what grounds.⁹² What responsibility should be borne by Faktum, Göschl, Nielsen Shipping, or the Bavarian Lloyd?⁹³ More importantly, what about the states in which these firms were based? The West Germans and Austrians alike exploited this ambiguity. To the authorities in Bonn, the UNEP's guidelines implied that, in a dispute concerning hazardous waste, the country of origin should accept the waste's return. Vienna countered that the UNEP directive merely provided non-binding guidance. In this exchange, it was revealing that only the intended recipients (and potential victims) of the trade in Turkey divined moral clarity from this legal ambiguity. From the Turkish perspective, German-Austrian wrangling over jurisdictional questions highlighted how international jurisprudence favoured industrialised nations and saddled the structurally weaker party, Turkey, with the toxic waste. To the Turkish minister of state responsible for the environment, Adnan Kahveci, the *Petersberg* affair illustrated the total impotence of the Turkish state in the face of a powerful international 'waste mafia' – a mafia that was aided and abetted by

⁸⁸ 'Betr.: Deutsches Schiff "MS Petersberg" mit kontaminierter Ladung vor Rumänien', 1 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch.

⁸⁹ 'Der Bundesminister für Verkehr to Chef des Bundeskanzleramtes, Betr.: Transport gefährlicher Güter mit Schiffen unter deutscher Flagge; hier: Bericht des BMW in der Kabinettsitzung am 21 Sept. 1988'; 'Bezug: Kabinetttvorlage des BMW vom 14.09.1988 – gl. Az.; Ergebnis der heutigen Staatssekretärsbesprechung', 16 Sep. 1988, B295/17547, BArch.

⁹⁰ 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr. See 13/26.40.70-10. Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschem Motorschiff "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988, B295/17596, BArch.

⁹¹ 'Bonn AA to BPA, BMW-See, BMU (Betr.: Oesterr. Presse am 911.1988, hier: MS Petersberg)', 9 Nov. 1988, B295/17596, BArch.

⁹² 'Betr.: Zusammenarbeit der Unterabteilung WA II mit Österreich', 29 Aug. 1988, B295/17595, BArch. On the Cairo Guidelines and Principles for the Environmentally Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes, elaborated under the United Nations Environment Program in 1982, see Chukwumerije Okereke, *Global Justice and Neoliberal Environmental Governance: Ethics, Sustainable Development and International Co-operation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 80; and Clapp, *Toxic Exports*, 39–40.

⁹³ 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Referat See 13/26.40.70-10-01/88, Betr.: Sondermülltransport mit deutschen Schiffen im Cross Trade MS "Petersberg"', 6 Oct. 1988, B295/17596, BArch.

the efforts of West German and Austrian authorities to shoulder *any* other country with responsibility.⁹⁴

In early November 1988, after the *Petersberg* had been at sea for five months, the Austrians and West Germans finally came to an agreement to end the saga (a deal from which, tellingly, Turkey was excluded). The Bavarian Lloyd would cover the previous transport costs of 7 million Austrian shillings (roughly US\$600,000) while the Austrian state would provide a guarantee of an additional 7 million shillings to ensure the disposal of the waste. Vienna would thus contribute financially to the elimination of the toxic cargo, without specifying where exactly this would take place, since the final destination was carefully removed from the public spotlight (and official record). This solution appeased Bonn but led to outrage in Austria, where newspaper editorialists accused the government of using taxpayers' money to bail out waste dealers. To many observers, in Austria and elsewhere, the affair left several open questions. Why had Vienna allowed the private interests of toxic waste exporters to place important international relationships at risk? If the cargo truly was no more harmful than Viennese cobblestones, as both the Germans and Austrians claimed, why did the West German and Austrian authorities go to such lengths to offload it onto others?⁹⁵ Was there something materially toxic in the *Petersberg's* hold, or did the row merely showcase the efforts of wealthy states like West Germany and Austria to create the political structures and legal precedents that would ultimately offload environmental problems onto poorer nations? To be sure, the story was puzzling in some respects. The intransigence of policy makers in Bonn and Vienna undermined Austrian claims about harmless construction waste – unless, of course, what the Austrians and West Germans were actually trying to protect was a legal system designed to outsource liability and damage, a toxic legal reality rather than a poisonous material one.

Turkish reactions betrayed the lingering suspicion that their country had fallen victim to an international conspiracy, mounted by toxic waste dealers and enabled by national policies and international agreements that originated among, and were designed to serve the interests of, industrialised nations. Rumours circulated in the Turkish press that powerful foreign interests had prevented Turkish authorities from boarding and inspecting the 'death ship', even when it was in Turkish waters. The suggestion was that waste exporters from places like West Germany and Austria were able to evade Turkish regulations precisely because they had the power to do so, thanks to their significant financial and political capital. Moreover, they did so in a manner, on boats just off Turkish shores, that was suggestively similar to the extra-legal spaces occupied by the European traders who had once dominated trade at Turkish ports thanks to the Ottoman-era capitulations.⁹⁶ Foreign exporters and shady Turkish dealers like Büyüktemiz pocketed the profits at the expense of the health of the Turkish people, the integrity of the Turkish environment, and the ability of the Turkish state to protect its borders from hazardous incursions. The *Petersberg* scandal revealed the many limitations faced by national, regional and local officials in developing nations – and how the supposed legal constraints faced by industrialised countries ultimately worked to the detriment of their poorer neighbours.⁹⁷ It also highlighted the scale of the problem. Although the *Petersberg* was stopped, surely, many in Turkey suspected, there were countless other 'death ships' that arrived undetected.

To Turks and Germans alike, the *Petersberg* affair epitomised a new type of international economic order that was emblematic of global capitalism in the late 1980s.⁹⁸ Developing countries might attempt

⁹⁴ See 'Çevre hukuku çöpe yetmiyor', *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988. The title reveals the Turkish concern ('[current] environmental law is not sufficient to stop the waste').

⁹⁵ 'Wien diplo Nr. 1774 vom 09.11.1988 an bonn aa', 9 Nov. 1988, B295/17596, BArch.

⁹⁶ Description of incident by Nielsen Shipping & Trading GmbH, untitled document, dated 17 Aug. 1988, addressed to 'Rudolf Seiters, MdB und 1er parlam. Geschäftsführer der CDU/CSU, Bonn' (Rudolf Seiters, Member of Parliament and First Parliamentary President of the CDU/CSU, Bonn), B295/17595, BArch. On the capitulations, see among others van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and Pamuk, Uneven Centuries*, 77–8.

⁹⁷ 'Zehirli çöp oyunu' *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Nov. 1988.

⁹⁸ It was a far cry from the calls for redistribution in the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s. On the NIEO, by way of contrast, see the special issue of *Humanity*, 6, 1 (2015) devoted to the subject. See also Anthony Anghie,

to protect themselves from environmental intrusions, as Turkey had done, but they would continue to face numerous imported hazards, in large part because of the regulatory holes and shadows that were exploited in different ways by waste traders and states alike. Indeed, by adding to the complexity of the trade, attempts to curtail it merely created *new* business opportunities for savvy operators like Faktum, Weber and Büyüktemiz – and new moral hiding places for government officials in industrialised nations. Since Turkey continued to import Western European garbage even after banning toxic waste, exporters remained able to classify their refuse as being ‘non-industrial’, as the *Petersberg*’s owners and sponsors had done. Not unlike the way investment banks sold toxic financial assets to unwitting buyers in the years leading up to the 2008 financial crisis, the toxic waste dealers of the late 1980s profited from their operation’s impenetrability.

If only unintentionally, the *Petersberg* affair had exposed the inner workings of a system that typically benefited waste traders, even if it hadn’t in this particular case (though West Germany and Austria did succeed in keeping the waste from returning to its country of origin); it was the exception that proved the rule. Although the *Petersberg* became stranded, the waste dealers were generally helped rather than hindered by their ability to shuffle, in this case, between the legal jurisdictions and physical spaces of two exporting states (West Germany and Austria), two importing countries (Austria and Turkey), and multiple transit points. As the West German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* noted in 1988, this ‘blossoming and expanding trade’ exploited the grey areas between open criminality and legal loopholes, relied on cash payments, avoided putting things in writing and hid behind various shell companies.⁹⁹ The *Petersberg* affair revealed how difficult it was to police a trade in which a ship that was legally domiciled in the northern German port of Eckernförde despite being physically based in Vienna might be owned by one West German company and operated by another, all while working together with at least three West German, Swiss and Turkish waste dealers. Together, the ‘Big Clean’ scandals of 1988 and the *Petersberg* affair were part of a new category of Western capitalism that was rooted not just in moving and hiding, but in commodifying and disguising, the dirtiest by-products of industrial production.

Epilogue

In the late 1980s, calls to end the toxic waste trade escalated in Western Europe and across the globe – and resulted in a global ban on toxic waste exports in March 1989. The signing on 22 March 1989 of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal was a momentous occasion, since, as the West German Minister of the Environment noted, the convention would finally put an end to the ‘rampant, uncontrolled “waste tourism”’ of the 1980s.¹⁰⁰ Just as its basic form mirrored the Turkish law passed one year earlier, the limitations of the Basel Convention were foreshadowed in different ways by the Isparta and *Petersberg* affairs. The Isparta scandal had highlighted the ability of savvy businesses to brand the waste trade as a form of economic development by preying on the need for hard currency and hopes for a better future;

‘Inequality, Human Rights, and the New International Economic Order’, *Humanity*, 10, 3 (2019); Giuliano Garavini, ‘Completing Decolonization. The 1973 “Oil Shock” and the Struggle for Economic Rights’, *The International History Review*, 33, 3 (2011) and ‘L’Europa occidentale e il Nuovo Ordine economico internazionale (1974–1977)’, *Ventesimo Secolo*, 6 (2006). On the wider dynamics of the period, see Christopher Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁹⁹ Christiane Grefe, ‘Gift für die Welt’, *Die Zeit*, 5 Aug. 1988, B.II.1, 999, AGG.

¹⁰⁰ On the connections between the Basel Convention and the toxic waste scandals of the 1980s, see Okereke, *Global Justice*, 81; and Brian J. Gareau and Cristina A. Lucier, ‘Neoliberal Restructuring of the World Polity: The Weakening of the Montreal Protocol and Basel Convention in Historical Perspective’, *Environmental Sociology*, 4, 3 (2018); Clapp, *Toxic Exports*, 40; Smith, *Challenging the Chip*, 264; Mark Montgomery, ‘Reassessing the Waste Trade Crisis: What Do We Really Know?’, *The Journal of Environment and Development*, 4, 1 (1995); ‘BMU Pressemitteilung, 101/89, 11 Okt. 1989, “Bundeskabinett beschließt Zeichnung des basler Uebereinkommens über die Kontrolle der grenzüberschreitenden Verbringung gefährlicher Abfälle und ihrer Entsorgung”’, B.II.1, 999, AGG.

and the ongoing economic justifications for the trade continued after 1989 as well. More pressingly, the *Petersberg* story had demonstrated that savvy dealers would continue to exploit loopholes and grey areas as long as the underlying economic incentives remained in place – and there was no sign that these incentives had simply disappeared when the Basel Convention was drafted.¹⁰¹

Instead, the public outcry over the toxic waste export scandals in the late 1980s, together with the signing of the Basel Convention, ratcheted up the pressure on West German and Western European industry to find dumping sites closer to home. If waste went outward in the 1980s, toward the European periphery, across the Iron Curtain and to the Global South, in the 1990s it was redirected to Europe's post-industrial landscapes. Margaret Thatcher's wave of deregulation and privatisation turned a deindustrialising United Kingdom into Western Europe's toxic waste dump.¹⁰² Almost immediately after reunification, the German federal government in Bonn began to discuss plans to build Europe's largest portfolio of toxic waste disposal sites in decommissioned coal mines in the East.¹⁰³ Using a newly domestic region as a toxic waste dump was a readapted version of the global trade of the 1980s. It would provide German industry with an escape hatch for a new era, at a domestic disposal site that wouldn't fall foul of environmentalist pressures or the West Germany's Basel Convention commitments. And it did so in the territory of a former state, East Germany, that took in Western European toxic waste in the 1980s in exchange for much-needed hard currency, much like Turkey and states in the Global South had done, only this state had now been absorbed into a reunified Germany.

At the same time, the export trade didn't merely disappear after the late 1980s. If the destination of *toxic* waste shifted, the underlying dynamics remained in place for forms of waste that were not considered to be dangerous industrial by-products. Indeed, for decades Turkey continued to receive shipments of German household garbage, including large amounts of environmentally damaging but notionally non-toxic plastics. Several decades after the *Petersberg* had left the Black Sea, a sequel was enacted, as a freighter carrying 141 shipping containers replete with plastic waste left the port of Hamburg in November 2020, en route to various Turkish ports. In response to a phenomenon that was once again dubbed 'waste colonialism', Turkey subsequently enacted (and then rescinded) a ban on plastic imports in early 2021. As a result, these containers were left stranded for around a year, before they were eventually disposed of in Vietnam.¹⁰⁴

The dizzying growth and reach of the global toxic waste trade in the 1980s shows how the problem of hazardous industrial refuse had come to symbolise a much wider set of concerns at the nexus of the economy and the environment. It was a vivid illustration of the environmental, material and health consequences of global inequalities. The Turkish-German waste scandals of 1988 revealed how older forms of political and economic dependency between the European core and periphery were repurposed to the exigencies of the 'Wastocene', and how the desperation born out of poverty and subjugation could quite literally be toxic. Indeed, if West German toxic waste exporters purposefully exploited the pathways of economic development and dependency connecting poorer nations to richer ones, one of the consequences of these stories was a redefinition of these concepts. To be 'developed' and 'advanced' increasingly implied the ability not just to produce advanced industrial goods, as had long been the case, but to avoid living alongside its toxic detritus – and to determine where this refuse would ultimately end up. It was this elusive control over poisonous materials that, as this article has shown, seemed to follow only the logic of a complex system in flux, rather than bending to the aspirations of any given institution or group.

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¹⁰¹ Clapp, *Toxic Exports*, 3.

¹⁰² Gourlay, *World of Waste*, 1992; Louis Blumberg and Robert Gottlieb, *War on Waste: Can America Win Its Battle with Garbage?* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1989), 5.

¹⁰³ 'Giftmüll: GAU im Bergbau', *Der Spiegel*, 25 Feb. 1991.

¹⁰⁴ "'Waste colonialism': world grapples with West's unwanted plastic", *The Guardian*, 31 Dec. 2021.

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